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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 TBILISI 000835

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR DAS BRYZA AND EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/14/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: DAS BRYZA'S MEETING WITH THE ABKHAZ

REF: TBILISI 806

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary. In a May 10 meeting in Abkhazia with DAS Matthew Bryza and Ambassador Tefft, Abkhaz de facto president Sergei Bagapsh left open the possibility for meeting with Georgian officials despite stating officially that the Abkhaz would not resume talks until Georgia removes its troops from the Upper Kodori Valley (UKV.) Follow-on meetings with Abkhaz de facto foreign minister Sergei Shamba indicated some flexibility in the Abkhaz position. In order to resume talks, Shamba sought a four part package consisting of: an agreement on reducing the number of Georgian troops in the UKV, a non-use of force pledge, the lifting of economic sanctions, and the establishment of a sea link between Trabzon and Sukhumi. Bryza underscored the importance of Abkhaz security concerns, and proposed initiating a new forum that would focus on the larger issues between the sides to catalyze direct Abkhaz-Georgian talks. This forum could include the U.S, Russia, EU, UN, OSCE and Black Sea countries as advisors and fundraisers for the implementation of peace initiatives. While in Abkhazia, Bryza also had meetings in Gali with UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) sector commander, UN police and human rights officials, local non-government organizations (NGO) and the de facto presidential representative for the Gali region. End summary.

ABKHAZ: WILL RESTART TALKS IF AGREEMENT TO 4 PART PLAN  
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¶2. (C) On May 10, DAS Matthew Bryza and Ambassador Tefft met Abkhaz de facto president Sergei Bagapsh and Abkhaz de facto foreign minister Sergei Shamba in Abkhazia. EUR/CARC Conflicts Advisor Michael Carpenter and Pol/Econ Chief also participated. Bagapsh emphasized the Abkhaz commitment to a peaceful resolution of the conflict. He lamented the fact that there were no contacts between the leaders of Abkhazia and Georgia, despite regular conversations in the past between former de facto president Ardzinba and former Georgian President Shevardnadze. Still, Bagapsh stated officially that the Abkhaz would not resume talks with Georgia until Georgia withdraws from the UKV. He proposed a solution whereby the Abkhaz and Georgians withdrew entirely from the Kodori valley, allowing the local Svan population (a Georgian sub-ethnic group) to police itself under the oversight of UN monitors. If there could be agreement on this, he said, the Abkhaz would re-start talks with Georgia.

¶3. (C) Bagapsh boasted that the Abkhaz had shot down the 5th Georgian unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) over Abkhazia on May 19. He claimed this one had been armed with a rocket. (Note: Our information is that the Georgians have lost 4 Hermes UAVs over Abkhazia as of May 12, one of which malfunctioned while three others were likely shot down (reftel). End note.) Bagapsh said that the Abkhaz would continue to shoot down Georgian UAVs flying over Abkhazia, acknowledging that such actions were a violation of the Moscow Agreement but

accusing the Georgian overflights of also being a violation. Bagapsh indicated some daylight between the Abkhaz and Russia, noting that he did not support some aspects of the latest Russian steps to move closer to Abkhazia. He said that one of the outcomes of Russia's March 6 decision to lift CIS economic and military sanctions is a change in the customs procedure which is going to reduce revenue from people traveling in and out of Abkhazia from Russia.

14. (C) Bagapsh reviewed the two main Abkhaz concerns: economic sanctions were impoverishing the population, and the Georgian military presence in the UKV was a direct threat to Abkhazia's security. Bryza responded that the U.S. has told the Georgians bluntly that if they start a war in Abkhazia, they would lose, they would be alone, and their NATO aspirations would be finished. Bryza argued for a need to energize the settlement process. The Group of Friends of the Secretary General focuses on minor issues. The U.S. would like to rise above these issues to jumpstart negotiations that work towards the goal of defining the political status of Abkhazia. Bryza praised the peace plan recently articulated by Georgian President Saakashvili, noting that it needs to be elaborated with input from the Abkhaz. Bryza said he hoped to see an Abkhaz-Georgian agreement on reducing troop levels in the Kodori valley as well as work on a peace plan which would flesh out ideas both on Abkhazian autonomy and on creating economic, cultural, and information links between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia. Such links could include opening a Black Sea ring road to Turkey, sea links between Sukhumi and Trabzon (which could later be extended to Batumi), and trade between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia.

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15. (C) Bagapsh recalled the reference to the need to discuss "additional ideas" in the UN Security Council Resolution's renewal of the UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) and said that the Abkhaz would want to discuss their "Key to the Future" proposal (which advocates independence) in any talks with the Georgians. Bryza responded that all issues could be discussed but that there needs to be a package of issues where each side receives something that it wants, and is open to compromise. He understood this list to be: security for the Abkhaz with an agreement to demilitarize the UKV, economic development for the Abkhaz, and the return of internationally displaced persons for the Georgians. Bryza suggested that this could be a starting point of discussions between the Abkhaz and Georgians that would be supported by others including the U.S., EU, OSCE, UN, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine and perhaps Bulgaria and Romania. Bryza stressed the need for direct negotiations together with a new forum that could oversee the implementation of concrete peace initiatives to get to the real issues that separate the sides. Although Bagapsh said he would not speak to Minister for Reintegration Yakobashvili as a result of Abkhaz objection to the renaming of his ministry from the Ministry for Conflict Resolution, he said he would meet the Georgian Minister for Foreign Affairs once there is an agreement on the UKV.

16. (C) In a separate follow-on meeting and dinner, Shamba indicated additional flexibility in the Abkhaz position, recognizing the need for direct talks with the Georgians. Shamba emphasized Abkhaz willingness to enter into direct talks with Georgia starting with a non-use of force pledge and an agreement on the return of IDPs. He hoped to move toward a preliminary agreement in a meeting on May 11 with Georgian Ambassador to the UN Irakli Alasania, who had quietly returned to Georgia in order to meet the Abkhaz to discuss the non-use of force/internally displaced persons agreement that faltered two years ago over a dispute on reference to the CIS peacekeeping force.

UN: UNABLE TO SEE OUTSIDE UNOMIG MANDATE ZONE

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17. (C) UNOMIG sector commander for Gali, Gyorgy Szekely (Hungary), estimated that there were about 2500 CIS peacekeeping forces (PKF) in the Conflict Zone (CZ) and Restricted Weapons Zone (RWZ), the area which UNOMIG monitors. He believed that the newly arrived PKF did not appear to be normal PKF based on their paratrooper insignia and heavy weaponry. Szekely confirmed that there were Chechens among the PKF, pointing to at least one CIS PKF checkpoint which is composed entirely of Chechens. Szekely emphasized that UNOMIG depends on the peacekeepers for its security because the UN observers are unarmed and that relations with the peacekeepers are good. He noted that the Gali Sector has one forward-deployed base which it activates when needed; this base is located within a current CIS PKF checkpoint near the ceasefire line. He acknowledged the need to better monitor the areas to the north as a result of Russian movement of additional peacekeepers into the CZ and RWZ. However, Szekely said he does not know what is happening outside of the areas which UNOMIG monitors.

UN POLICE: ADVISORS WITH NO POLICING MANDATE  
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18. (C) Several UN Police advisors attached to the Gali UNOMIG headquarters briefed DAS Bryza and the Ambassador on their operations. They noted that their 2003 mandate (UNSCR 1494) is to "monitor and advise local law enforcement agencies" but does not extend to actual law enforcement. The UN Police in Abkhazia consist of three officers in Sukhumi, three in Gali, and a liaison officer in Tbilisi. The officers in Gali said they cannot conduct investigations themselves because of their mandate, and their limited Russian language skills make their job advising the Abkhaz militia difficult. They noted that the local Gali population generally does not report crimes because they do not believe the Abkhaz militia will do anything.

HUMAN RIGHTS IN GALI: MAIN ISSUE IS SECURITY  
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19. (C) The Head of the UN Human Rights Office in Abkhazia, Ryszard Komenda (Poland), reported that the main human rights problems in Abkhazia remained in the ethnic Georgian Gali region. In order to be effective, however, the UN Human Rights Office focuses on both the Gali region and the rest of Abkhazia. The biggest issue overall remains that of property ownership. The movement from the Soviet system of a complete lack of property ownership to the capitalist system has

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result in confusion over property rights. In addition, Russian investors are coming in with a lot of money to "buy" property in Abkhazia. The biggest issues in Gali remains the persecution and harassment of the local population. This encompasses all areas of life including education, property, and freedom of movement. Two UN Human Rights Officers work in Gali out of the UN headquarters there. The Human Rights Office continues to press the Abkhaz to allow the HROs to hold regular hours at a nearby Human Rights Center to allow easier access for citizens. He agreed with Bryza that it would be useful to make his office's regular reports of the human rights situation public or at least available to the Friends of the Secretary General in order to shine a light on the human rights problems there. At the moment, they are confidential and limited to internal distribution only. Bryza offered to weigh in with UNOMIG and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to make this happen.

NGOS ASK FOR MORE U.S. INVOLVEMENT  
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110. (C) In a meeting with Bryza and the Ambassador, local non-government organizations (NGO) in the ethnic Georgian Gali district raised the following key points:

-- they noted the isolation of the ethnic Georgian community in Gali and advocated for assistance programs which establish economic and cultural links between the residents of Gali and those in other parts of Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia;

-- they raised concerns about security, noting that measures to give the ethnic Georgian population in Gali Abkhaz passports (and require that they renounce their Georgian citizenship), the regular closure of the administrative border, and the rampant criminality all foster a sense of insecurity in the population. Singling out Rustavi 2, the NGOs complained that Georgian media broadcasts sensationalist stories that actually increases tensions. They called for international police which could have a mandate to police the area;

-- they thanked the U.S. for recruiting students from Gali for U.S. funded education programs and urged that such recruitment continue to give young people there access to the outside world. They asked for more involvement overall in Gali by the Friends of the Secretary General and the U.S.; and,

-- they asked the U.S. to press for continued and increased funding from the Georgian Government for health care for the population. The de facto authorities did not provide for the basic needs of the population in Gali, and the amount provided by the Georgian Government was not enough. One prominent NGO which operates in Lower Gali described the urgent need for medical care, noting that patients routinely die during transport to Tbilisi for treatment. She said that the one major item the people need is an emergency vehicle to transport sick people to medical care.

#### LOCAL DE FACTO LEADER AGREES TO NEW PROCESS

11. (C) Local de facto leader (and representative of de facto president Bagapsh in Abkhazia) Ruslan Kishmaria said that talks with the Georgians were stalled because of a lack of political will. He agreed with Bryza that the conflict needs to be solved to avoid war and that the sides need to speak to each other in order to move toward a solution. He proposed starting talks at the low levels, starting with resuming the Quadripartite Meetings on security issues as well as by starting to count the number of returned IDPs. He claimed both of these were suspended at the request of the Georgians. Kishmaria agreed with Bryza on the need to find a way to re-energize the settlement process and said he supported any attempts to solve the conflict which he believed could have been solved 15 years ago had there been goodwill to make it happen.

#### COMMENT

12. (C) Comment: The Abkhaz, even the usually aggressive and inflexible Kishmaria, were clearly trying to appear as constructive as possible in their talks with Bryza. When Shamba started to debate strongly why Abkhazia should be recognized like Kosovo, Bagapsh cut short his polemics. Although both Bagapsh and Shamba initially stuck to the official Abkhaz policy of preconditioning direct talks on Georgian withdrawal from the UKV, there was an clear willingness to engage with the Georgians unofficially.

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Shamba offered some additional insight into Abkhaz thinking during follow-on discussions: he told Bryza that he realizes that war would be disastrous for everyone, including the Abkhaz; he asked whether the U.S. would block a nearby or neighboring country from recognizing Abkhazia; he said the Abkhaz do not want to be part of Russia and that the Abkhaz use the leverage it has with the North Caucasus to extract concessions from Russia; and that he collaborated with

Chechen leader Dudayev and Basayev in the late 80s and 90s in support of Chechen independence, only breaking with Basayev in the 90s when he began to talk about a war of Islam. The Abkhaz seem to be pursuing, as Bagapsh has said publicly, a "multi-vector" diplomacy. Disappointed that Russia did not recognize them as they hoped following Kosovo's independence, the Abkhaz appear to be trying to reach out to the U.S. and the Europeans to find a way that will advance their goal of independence. Indeed, during the joint press conference after the official meeting in Sukhumi, Shamba said that he feels safe because the Americans are in Abkhazia and have pledged to do all they can to restrain the Georgians. End comment.

TEFFT